

KATTY

By Mike McCormick

A.O.H. Historian



He called her Katty. That was the name Thomas J Clarke had for Kathleen Daly, niece of a fellow prisoner with whom he had been incarcerated for Fenian activities against England. She was a member of an Irish nationalist family, niece of patriot John Daly and sister of executed 1916 leader Edward Daly. She later became the wife of Tom Clarke and guardian of the dreams and plans held sacred by a whole generation of Irish patriots. This is her story.

She was born on April 11, 1878. By the time her uncle John was released from British prison in 1895, 17-year old Kathleen already knew the man she would marry, though they had never met. She knew him through her uncle's letters praising the courage, determination, and tenacity of his fellow prisoner, Tom Clarke. When Clarke was released three years later, he came to the Daly home in Limerick to recuperate. Little did her uncle realize the awe in which young Kathleen held his old friend, until years' end when they announced their engagement. Tom left for New York in 1900 to secure a job, and in 1901, his Katty joined him there. They married, and settled in the Bronx. A year later, they moved to Brooklyn, and eventually bought a farm in Manorville, Long Island.

When war between England and Germany seemed inevitable, Tom and other high-ranking members of Clan na Gael felt that Ireland's day of liberation was at hand. He was asked to return to Ireland and reorganize the outdated and inactive Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), but Katty would not hear of it. She remembered the frail and battered figure that had limped to her home in 1898, nearly dead from starvation and torture. She pleaded that he had done as much as any man could be expected to do for his country, and reminded him that he was still a parolee, subject to arrest if the authorities even suspected what he was up to. Tom, reminded her of the premature death of her father, the torture endured by her uncle, and the grief imposed on her mother and grandmother by a cruel and reckless alien force in their homeland. In his own persuasive way, Tom had fanned the smoldering coals of Katty's nationalist soul, and rekindled her passion for Ireland. Together, they sailed to Ireland, and into the pages of Irish history.

Kathleen's strong nationalist sentiment made her invaluable to Tom's re-organizing activities. Together, they started a nationalist newspaper, and, as Tom organized the men of Ireland into the Irish Volunteers, Katty joined the Daughters of Ireland, and Cumann na mBan - the ladies auxiliary to the Volunteers - and did likewise with the women. Together, they prepared an army of men and women to strike at Easter, 1916, for Ireland's freedom. Her patriotism, as well as that of her family was well known to the IRB Supreme Council. As evidence of their confidence in her, Kathleen was chosen to safeguard the details of the entire Volunteer network with the names of secondary and tertiary leaders throughout the country. She was also entrusted with the plans, property and funds of the organization with the instructions that if they were arrested after the rising, she was to pass them on to an individual of her choosing who could organize a new generation of leaders and fulfill their dream of a free Ireland. *It was to my mind great foresight on the part of the IRB to have done this, she said, as I was in a position after the Rising, when all the key men whose names I had were arrested, of knowing where to take hold and keep things going.*

Thus it was, that when Tom Clarke and the other leaders were executed after the 1916 Easter Rising, their dream did not die with them. After the Rising, England rounded up and interned many of Ireland's men of military age, whether they were members of the Volunteers or not. Katty Clarke used the funds left her to set up an Irish Republican Prisoners Dependant's Fund with offices around the country, based on the Volunteers Network the IRB

had given her. She staffed them primarily with women of Cumann na mBan, which grew from 63 to 800 branches nationwide by 1921. These offices cared for the families of the men who were interned until they were released in December for lack of evidence. Later, those offices helped settle returning prisoners, many of whom had not been active Volunteers when they were incarcerated, but who certainly were upon release. She interviewed many of the returning men and decided who would be the new leader; it was a wise decision when she turned over the organization's files and assets to Michael Collins. Collins used the network of offices set up by Katty Clarke to reorganize a national liberation force and began the War of Independence that fought England to the Treaty table in 1921 and the ultimate creation of the Republic of Ireland.

Through the War of Independence, into the years of the Irish Free State and to the creation of the Republic of Ireland, Mrs. Tom Clarke, as she preferred to be called, served her country as no other woman had. In addition to being a loyal wife and mother, she had been prisoner, Judge, Deputy Minister, Senator, and became the first woman Lord Mayor in Irish history as Lord Mayor of Dublin. After her death at 94 in 1972, she received the rare honor of a state funeral.

Remembered for her many deeds, she is perhaps best remembered for her statement to Cumann na mBan after the execution of her husband Thomas J. Clarke. She said, *Without the efforts of the women of Cumann na mBan, the Rising would have been for nothing. She told them, Our men are nearly all in prison, some are dead, and it is up to us to carry on their work . . . Let us show our enemy what Irish women can do!*